

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 002009

SIPDIS

NSC FOR CBARTON
USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD
USAID DCHA/OTI FOR RPORTER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/27/2014
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [VE](#)
SUBJECT: PARAMILITARIES UPDATE

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABELARDO A. ARIAS FOR REASONS 1.4 (d
)

SUMMARY

1. The May 9 discovery of alleged Colombian paramilitaries, replaced in national headlines by the appeals process and the announcement of the recall referendum, remains a salient issue. The National Assembly has convened special investigative commission, which has already interviewed the Minister of Defense and has plans to interview several other high-ranking government officials. The GOV has also issued detention orders for four senior military officers for alleged connections to the paramilitaries case. Ten military officers and civilians have already been detained for alleged connections to the paramilitaries, and trials begin for first cases in the next two weeks. End Summary.

SPECIAL INVESTIGATIVE COMMISSION

2. (U) The National Assembly (NA) has convened a Special Parliamentary Commission to investigate the case of the alleged Colombian paramilitaries discovered on the outskirts of Caracas on May 9. The NA appointed Nestor Leon Heredia, a Movimiento Quinta Republica (MVR) deputy and former military officer, as president of the Commission. On June 7, the Commission "privately" interviewed Minister of Defense Jorge Luis Garcia Carneiro. The Commission plans to conduct additional interviews with Minister of Interior and Justice Lucas Rincon and Army Commander Gen. Raul Baduel, as well as the directors of DISIP (security police) and the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DIM).

TARGETING THE MILITARY

3. (U) As of June 1, the GOV had issued detention orders for four retired military officers in connection with the paramilitaries case; Gen. Nestor Gonzalez Gonzalez, Gen. Felipe Rodriguez, Gen. Ovido Poggioli and Col. Julio Rodriguez Salas. On June 6, the GOV publicly offered a reward of twenty-five thousand dollar for information leading to the arrest of each of the four military officers. In addition to links to the paramilitaries, the reward advertisements allege three of the officers are guilty of military rebellion, a reference to their involvement in the October 2002 civil disobedience at Plaza Francia.

4. (U) On June 8, Gen. Ovido Poggioli, a former director of the DIM, voluntarily presented himself to the Military Prosecutor's Office, claiming that he had nothing to fear from the government's accusations. DISIP took Poggioli in custody for forty-eight hours following his appearance at the Military Prosecutor's Office. He is currently being held at a military detention center in Caracas.

5. (C) On June 14, poloff met with Alonso Medina, a defense lawyer specializing in military cases. In addition to Poggioli, according to Medina, seven military officers and three civilians have been detained for alleged involvement in the paramilitaries case. Medina noted that the first paramilitary involvement cases are scheduled to go to trial in the next two weeks.

MORE PARAMILITARIES TO COME?

(U) On June 14, Eliecer Otaiza, MVR party figure and former director of DISIP, also currently president of the National Institute of Educational Cooperation, alleged that the paramilitaries detained at El Hatillo merely represent the tip of the iceberg and that there are between four and five thousand paramilitaries currently in Venezuela. Otaiza

repeated the assertion that these alleged paramilitaries are seeking to assassinate President Chavez and other political leaders, and are a threat to Venezuelan sovereignty, the democratic process and the Bolivarian revolution.

COMMENT

(C) The targeting of numerous military officers for alleged connections to the paramilitaries case is part of an increased GOV campaign to persecute military officers it considers disloyal, including officers connected with the October 2002 Plaza Francia incident and the events of April 12002. Allegations that there are between four and five thousand additional paramilitaries currently in Venezuela, however implausible, could produce a new set of the distractions for the GOV to use in the period leading up to the referendum. The commencement of trials in the next two weeks will provide insight into how the GOV plans to use the paramilitaries issue.
SHAPIRO

NNNN

2004CARACA02009 - CONFIDENTIAL